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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: PARLIAMENT CONFIRMS EX-PM'S IMMUNITY
REVOCATION

REF: SKOPJE 633

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) On August 20, the Macedonian Parliament voted to revoke the immunity of former Prime Minister and current opposition MP Vlado Buckovski. Buckovski is being investigated by the Macedonian authorities for alleged irregularities in procurement while he was Minister of Defense in 2001 (Ref). The Parliament's vote confirmed the disputed August 2 decision by the Parliamentary Committee on Immunity to revoke Buckovski's immunity (reftel). The 18 days between the two decisions saw heated public accusations between the governing party VMRO-DPMNE and Buckovski's SDSM. The case will now likely proceed to a trial, though Buckovski claims he has presented documentary evidence that exonerates him. SDSM's VP Igor Ilievski told us SDSM will still be willing to work with the GOM on issues critical for Macedonia's potential NATO invitation, including constituting the State Judicial Council. End summary.

Long Debate, Inevitable Outcome

12. (U) On August 20, after three days of intensive debate, Parliament revoked the immunity of former Prime Minister and current opposition SDSM MP, Vlado Buckovski. SDSM, DUI and other smaller opposition party MPs boycotted the vote. Out of the 61 MPs that remained, 59 voted in favor, one abstained, and one did not vote. According to the Parliamentary rulebook, the full Parliament needed to confirm the decision taken by the Parliamentary Committee on Immunity on August 2 during a contentious midnight session. Buckovski will remain free from detention while he defends himself.

13. (SBU) The period between the two votes included heightened rhetoric and accusations between the ruling VMRO-DPMNE and its biggest ethnic Macedonian rival SDSM. The government tried to present SDSM's defense of Buckovski as unwillingness to fight corruption. Not to be outdone, SDSM's President Sekerinska accused the governing coalition of "fear-mongering" and violating the rule of law in the country. During the parliamentary debate, SDSM MPs argued that they were not trying to protect their own from facing corruption charges, but rather that the Parliamentary Committee had not followed legitimate procedures and that the GOM had tried to orchestrate a media show surrounding stripping Buckovski of his immunity.

14. (SBU) Buckovski had hoped that he might be able to drive a wedge between the ruling coalition on the vote. He had evidently believed that MPs from two parties in the GOM, DPA and NSDP, might be swayed to vote with SDSM, or at least

abstain from the vote. In his final statement during the debate, Buckovski made clear his disappointment that the MPs from these parties would not support him.

15. (SBU) On August 23, the media quoted Buckovski's lawyers as saying that the initial investigation was over. The court has refused to hear any new witnesses from the Ministry of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Public Prosecutor will now decide if there are enough grounds to press charges against those involved in the case. Buckovski claimed he submitted new evidence which exonerated him of any guilt, but it is likely the case will go forward. It is unknown how long it will take for Buckovski's trial to start, or to reach a verdict. Past experience with the trial of former VMRO Defense Minister Paunovski shows that such trials can take years, while other trials have proceeded relatively quickly.

16. (SBU) A front-page story just days ago, Buckovski's plight is losing media attention now. SDSM VP Igor Ilievski reiterated to us what other SDSM leaders have said - SDSM was not trying to protect Buckovski personally, but rather they were sending a message to the GOM that it had to follow the proper procedures in Parliament and the justice system. Ilievski made clear that - having made its political points in Parliament - SDSM was now ready to work with the government on constituting the State Judicial Council and other issues important for Macedonia's potential NATO invitation.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) On the surface, this episode of Macedonian political confrontation seems to have had something for both VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM: VMRO-DPMNE supporters were pleased that the government is determined to fight corruption by going

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after a former top official; SDSM supporters were united by the GOM's poor handling of the case in Parliament and in its bungled attempt to score points in the media with pictures of Buckovski in police custody.
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